

InfoTech Column
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The New Mobility by Stephen Abram

When I was a baby librarian, the mindset that I had was that librarianship was practiced in libraries. Seemed logical and I never dreamed that mindset would become such an artifact of another age. Then I found myself spending my early career in special libraries where most of my work contact was outside of my small library. The research technology started to catch up later when I could 'get online' to New York Times, InfoGlobe, Dialog, LexisNexis, and others long forgotten from anywhere I could connect my dial up modem. I could even take some major databases along on CD-ROM. Eventually I developed the mindset that the library was ME and that I could practice anywhere. That mindset has stood me in good stead for many years as I practice librarianship from conference centers, airports, planes, and hotels around the world with little effect on the quality of my work (I hope!). This has been helped out by laptops where broadband wireless connectivity and long battery life have become the norm. I can also search and pick up e-mail on my phone. Of course, the web seems to be ubiquitously available as long as you can find a Starbucks or another wireless hotspot.

Now, that said, it has been surprisingly difficult to be entirely seamless with respect to my physical location and the locations of my files (documents, spreadsheets, presentations, contact lists, etc.) Sure I could try to remember to make sure they were loaded on my laptop or I could bring along a USB drive with docs I might potentially need, and I could e-mail docs to myself and pick them up on business center PC's as well – sometimes you just have to print! These strategies could work but it seems that the one document you actually need to make your life easier is the one you can't get at from afar. Then you get that sinking feeling that you're going to have to recreate. Yuck.

I think times are changing. Three major outfits (and lots more) are offering the ability to do all of the things you do within your office suite applications and more without need for hard drives and the like. Web based office suites are moving into prime time. I'll highlight two in this month's column: Google Docs and Zoho.

We can see Zoho and Google assembling a suite of web- based applications. It's more than that though. In the near term, it's also a suite of applications that more seamlessly integrate with today's workflow. It aligns with our modern lifestyles that see our overlapping work, learning, play and entertainment modalities. Add this to a trend towards smaller, more functional and more ubiquitous mobile devices like the Apple iPhone and rumoured MS and Google

phones, and we see a real shift in the technology firmament. Ultimately these will create team collaboration opportunities on a scale that Lotus Notes could only dream of in the past. (Then again, IBM / Lotus has started making rumblings in this space with their Lotus Symphony re-launch.) Google is providing tools to permission and authenticate users into your documents for collaborative work.

So what can we expect from the two major players out in the market so far?

Google

Google Docs

Originally this was a list of products that were developed internally or acquired by Google. There was Google Docs and Google spreadsheets and then Google Docs and Spreadsheets. The Google introduced Google Presentations and went back to the Google Docs branding for creating, storing and sharing documents, spreadsheets and presentations on the web. Since Google Docs accepts many of the most popular file formats, including DOC, XLS, ODT, ODS, RTF, CSV, PPT, etc. I suppose it was easier to simplify. You can create, edit and upload quickly and easily import your existing documents, spreadsheets and presentations, or create new ones from scratch. More importantly, you can access and edit these documents from anywhere, any web connected browser. And, if your team is all over the place you can share changes in real time and invite people to review your documents and make changes together, at the same time. This sounds like an ideal application for association committee work! Google claims that your documents are stored securely online. If it matters I should also note that it's free. Eye's wide open this will become an advertising space and the content of your documents could be used for targeting mailings and ads.

Add other workflow tools or necessary applications to the Google suite above and you can see the beginning of a powerful package. As opposed to targeting the enterprise of business space, it seems to be targeting the student and individual professional. The enterprise space can license **Google Apps** for a fee.

gMail: Integrating mail into your office suite a la MS Outlook.

Google Talk: Integrating SMS and IM into your workflow.

GOOG-411: find phone numbers by voice (dial 1-800-GOOG-411)

Google Calendar: Develop your own or collaborative calendar on the web

Google Reader: An RSS reader for blogs and website monitoring

Google Notebook: Clip and collect information as you research

Google Personalized Search: Get the search results most relevant to you

iGoogle: Add information you care about to your Google homepage

Google Maps: View maps, get driving directions, and search for local businesses and services. Search by location coming.
Google Scholar: Search through articles and other scholarly literature
Google SMS (US): Do queries from your mobile phone
Google Desktop: Find all *your* information, whether it's on the web or stored on your computer, from a single search
Google Groups 2: Create and join searchable discussion groups and mailing lists
Google Orkut Google's social networking pilot
Google Web Alerts: Find out about new web pages on a topic of interest
Google Glossary: Find definitions for words, phrases and acronyms

Google is launching mobile versions of these applications. gMail started in Oct. 2007.

Zoho

Zoho is a new player. They have a fairly huge suite of web based applications and storage of your files in the ether modes. Over time Zoho has the potential to be a big player – although it might end up aligning or merging with one of the big social space concerns. Right now they seem to be targeting the busy professional market – us! Here's what you can do already at

<http://www.zoho.com>:

Zoho Writer: Online Word Processor
Zoho Projects: Project Management Software
Zoho Sheet: Spreadsheets Online
Zoho CRM: On-Demand CRM Solution
Zoho Show: Online Presentation Tool
Zoho Creator: Create Database Applications
Zoho Meeting: Web Conferencing
Zoho Wiki: Easy to use, full-featured Wiki
Zoho Notebook: Online Note Taker
Zoho Chat: Make Group Decisions Faster
Zoho DB & Reports: Online Database & Reporting
Zoho Planner: Online Organizer
Zoho Viewer: View and Share Documents Online
Site 24x7: Website Monitoring Service
Zoho Polls: Online Polls in a snap
Zoho Challenge: Easiest Way to Evaluate Candidates

Zoho also hints at additional applications with their private betas:

Zoho Mail (private beta): Collaboration Groupware
Zoho Business (private beta): Powerful online solutions for your business

Of course, Google and Zoho are targeting the sweet spot of Microsoft's business – Microsoft Office. Since they don't have the ball and chain of the legacy

applications and they can design for mobility from the get go, they're a real threat to the traditional enterprise software business model. As of this column's writing it is rumoured that Microsoft will be launching a Office Live Workspace version of its office suite of Word, Excel, PowerPoint, et al. Rumours are that MySpace and Facebook are looking at offering similar functionality as part of their core social space. More competition creates better offerings. Cool.

Either way, just like other peripatetic professionals – lawyers, doctors, nurses, accountants, tax experts, etc. – we have an opportunity to be fully functional and operate a high level of professional service – without ever hitting our desk chair. Cool.

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